

# THE EUGENICS REVIEW

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"Eugenics is the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally."

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## NOTES OF THE QUARTER

THIS issue of the REVIEW is concerned largely with population problems, in particular with the problems created by the decline in birth-rates throughout the Western World. In these notes we shall consider one of these problems only—namely the bearing of the population trend on birth-control propaganda and the dissemination of birth-control knowledge.

For a starting point one cannot do better than take the following summary of facts and conclusions in Professor A. M. Carr-Saunders's survey of *World Population*, which has recently been published under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs.\*

"At the moment in this country," he writes, "the reproduction rate is about 25 per cent. below replacement rate. If all children born were wanted (that is wanted before conception), the former rate would probably be 50 per cent. below the latter. But the day when all children will be wanted children is certainly coming, for contraceptive methods are undergoing continual improvement. The perfect contraceptive, cheap, easy to use, and infallible, may be invented any day. Therefore, if things remain as they are, the

reproduction rate will fall, and the prospect will be a reduction of the population to less than a quarter of its present size a century from now. But the coming of this catastrophic decline will be masked for a time by the fact that in any case the fall will not be large during the next two decades. The population will decline at the most by three or four millions in the next twenty years. This fall will be welcome to the many who believe that unemployment is due to over-population. Meanwhile people will come to think that they are rendering positive service by keeping their families small. All the habits connected with the small family system will harden into customs. Any suggestion that more births are desirable will meet with the impassioned opposition of birth-control enthusiasts. The prospect of so catastrophic a fall makes it urgent that steps should be taken at once, and the difficulties, which will be encountered in undertaking the social reconstruction that is necessary, are so formidable that the urgency is much enhanced."\*

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About this statement upon the direction and pace of our population trend there can be no reasonable dispute. Every population statistician now agrees about the direction, and about the pace the only question that might arise is whether the estimate may not be more moderate than a survey of population trends does in fact warrant. But it is to be hoped that the prediction about "birth-control enthusiasts," that they will passionately oppose any suggestion that more births are desirable, will be falsified by the events. If it is not, then the birth-control movement, in face of a menace of depopulation, will have proved itself incapable of correctly interpreting either its own functions or the urgent

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\* Oxford, 1936. The Clarendon Press. Pp. xv + 336. Price 12s. 6d.

\* *Loc. cit.*, p. 258.

need of our times. For it can now be asserted definitely that if the purpose of birth-control were indeed to ensure a decline in the numbers of our population, then the organizations that exist to disseminate its doctrines and create facilities for its practice could shut up shop at this minute. It is virtually certain, a prediction rather than an estimate, that within a few years such a decline will take place, at first so slowly as almost to appear beneficent but soon so precipitously as to threaten us with virtual extinction. This is not, as Dr. Blacker demonstrates in his article on *The Future of our Population* (page 205), something that may happen if we do not take steps soon to prevent it, not an issue that we can light-heartedly bequeath to posterity to concern itself with, but an inevitable outcome of the trends of births and deaths that exist among us this very day. And not only here in Great Britain. With one significant exception—Soviet Russia—every country in Europe has suffered a decline, fluctuating a little in one or two cases, but in most steady and rapid, in the net reproduction rates obtaining between the years 1871 and the present day.

"In north and west Europe and in Austria and Hungary, where the rate is below unity, the population will presently begin to decline unless there is an immediate and considerable rise in fertility. In the remaining countries the population will continue to increase if fertility is stabilized at its present level; but of stabilization there is, as we have seen, no sign, and these countries are approaching year by year a time when their populations will no longer replace themselves."\*

In Australia and New Zealand the net reproduction rate was still above unity in the early 1920's; in the United States the rate was 1.08 as recently as 1930. But in both dominions it had fallen below unity by 1932, and in the United States it is probably so to-day.

"The position in Canada is complicated by the contrast between Quebec and the

other provinces. According to Mr. Kuczynski the present fertility of Quebec is about the same as that of Germany in 1900, whereas in Ontario and the maritime provinces it is as low as in western Europe."\*

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To suggest, as confronted by these facts some have done, that even if the present fertility cannot suffice to maintain our numbers, it will do so in the future, when improved health conditions have brought about a further decline in the death-rate, is to show a complete failure to realize the very narrow limits within which a decline in mortality can influence the trend of population. As far as this is concerned,

"it does not matter whether women all die on reaching the end of the child-bearing period or live to be a hundred years old. What matters is whether 1,000 women leave another 1,000 women behind them, and the only improvement which can help here is the decrease in the mortality of women before they reach the age of 45 or thereabouts. . . . But the scope for decreasing mortality among women before the end of the child-bearing period is much less than is generally believed. From the point of view of the trend of population the ideal would be that every girl baby born should live until the end of the child-bearing period. Let us be generous and put this at the age of 50. Then, if it begins at 15, the ideal would be that every girl baby born should live through 35 years (from age 15 to age 50) in the child-bearing period. Already in this country the average number of years lived in the child-bearing period by each girl baby born is over 30. Clearly the scope for improvement is very small. There will be improvement, but the average number of years so lived can never reach 35 and may never be much over 33. It is much to be desired that the widely current and wholly erroneous notion about the effect of reduced mortality upon the trend of population should be dispelled."†

\* *Loc. cit.*, p. 129.

\* *Loc. cit.*, p. 124.

† *Loc. cit.*, p. 125.

The only important cause of the decline in the birth-rate is that "married women of given age are far less likely to bear a child within a year than formerly"; the only way to stem the downward movement in our numbers is to reverse this trend in specific fertility rates.

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We may now return to the question with which these notes opened. What is the bearing of the population trend on birth-control policy in this country? It is common knowledge that among the supporters of birth-control there are many who claim that it is a trend to be welcomed and encouraged. Should the birth-control movement as a whole follow them in this view? Should it continue to regard itself, as it did when it based itself almost exclusively on the doctrine that man with unlimited powers of multiplication must come somehow or other to terms with a world in which his capacity to produce food is severely limited—should it continue to regard itself, now as then, as primarily a movement for promoting "family limitation"? Those who adhere to this doctrine, the stalwarts who in this world of falling birth-rates wait unparalleted and increasing productive capacity find no difficulty in believing that population is pressing on the means of production, ask rhetorically how, in a period of unemployment, anyone can fail to rejoice at signs that soon this pressure may be relieved. It is a simple, indeed a highly plausible proposition, and to show that there is no deception its supporters even put it in numerical terms. There are a million, two million, whatever the number at the moment may be, unemployed; what then can be more certain than that reducing the population by that amount—the volume of unemployment representing the volume of over-population—would automatically bring into being that Utopia wherein there would be work for all?

This, we hasten to add, is not a parody. In his recently published *Population Movements*,\* Dr. R. R. Kuczynski describes how,

some years ago in Berlin, when unemployment was at its height, he heard a well-known economist state at a public meeting that he could not understand anyone, in view of such a state of affairs, questioning the need for more birth-control. The audience could not understand either, and applauded enthusiastically.

"A few days after my arrival in Washington," he continues, "one of the most prominent American experts on labour problems said in a radio talk that people should not wonder at the large number of unemployed, in view of the ever-increasing population. It evidently has escaped the attention of many of those whose business it is to form public opinion that it is not the newly born children who crowd the labour market and that it is only a small proportion of the deceased who create occupational openings by their death. I even venture to say that if one set out to increase unemployment in a given country for the next fifteen years, one could find no more efficient means than birth-restriction on a very large scale.

"Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that birth-restriction should go so far that no child would be born in that country during the next fifteen years. What would be the effect upon the labour market? Certainly, not a single man would find work more easily merely because no more children were being born. As a matter of fact the number of persons looking for a job would increase in the next fifteen years as in the past, because there would be more boys and girls reaching the bread-winning age than men and women leaving their jobs on account of old age, death, etc. The number of job-hunters might increase even more than before, because many young women who, if they had children, would not work might be looking for work if they had no children. What is still worse, the number of people thrown out of employment would increase at a terrific speed. The industries catering for the needs of the youngest children would be the first to be ruined.

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\* Reviewed on p. 227.

They would be followed by those supplying the wants of the older children, and so on. Teachers would lose employment, and so forth. It may seem at first sight as if the lack of children could not possibly reduce the national income and that, if the total purchasing power remained the same, industry as a whole would not be worse off. But with the increasing number of unemployed, wages and salaries would necessarily drop so that the national income and the demand for goods would decrease after all. Conditions might change again when, in fifteen years from now, labour would become scarce because there would not be any young people to fill the positions then becoming vacant by reason of disability or old age, just as lodgings may become vacant in Germany twenty years after the cradles were left empty.”\*

This is what Professor Carr-Saunders says on the same question :

“ If anyone believes that unemployment is a sign of over-population, let him consider two facts. Unemployment has come to this country in waves ; between the waves it was man-power and not work that was lacking. If we graph the unemployment percentage we get a sharply fluctuating curve, whereas the growth of population is represented by a steadily ascending line, and there is no sign of any relation between them. Anyone who thinks that the intermittent unemployment crises have been due to excessive numbers must hold that this country has been over-populated every few years, while in the intervals population has been in adjustment. Secondly, in the United States there has recently been relatively more unemployment than in this country ; but in the United States, which are favoured above all other countries by richness in natural resources, geographical location, and an enterprising population, there are less than fifty persons per square mile as against about 700 in this country. There cannot be any over-population in

the United States, and yet unemployment has been more severe there than here.

“ It is evident in fact that there may be over-population without unemployment, and unemployment without over-population.”\*

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It is surely by now clear that the birth-control organizations will do a disservice to their cause if they continue to advocate birth-control as a means of solving problems which it cannot and is not designed to solve. If they continue to maintain that there exists, or is likely within a measurable time to exist, a problem of over-population, they will lose, and rightly, the influence they have gained over our personal and social lives since the 70's of the last century.

In a period of declining population it is not enough, however, that the birth-control movement should discard what was formerly one of its mainstays and has now become an encumbrance. It must not content itself to forgo an argument that has become irrelevant to the conditions of the day, and leave the rest of its propaganda exactly where it was. When quantity fails there is inevitably a greater and growing concern with quality ; and advocates of birth-control must be prepared to meet the very serious objection that while promoting individual happiness and welfare they are jeopardizing the biological welfare of the race. This objection to birth-control—that by promoting the small family system mainly among the best-endowed and most responsible sections of society it is a dangerous dysgenic force—can no longer be met by mere argument. It must be met by action, by a policy which brings the activities of the birth-control movement into line with those of the *Eugenics Society*. By nothing short of that.

As a necessary first step, the birth-control movement must make it clear, in its propaganda, in its educational literature, in its programme, that, whatever may have been the case in the past, it does not now exist to facilitate the establishment of small families,

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\* *Population Movements*, p. 65.

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\* *World Population*, p. 138.

but to promote what Carr-Saunders has called "the voluntary family system." For its own preservation it must formulate a programme of positive eugenics—a policy which, while continuing to favour restriction of births among physically and mentally ill-endowed persons and spacing of births as a means of preserving maternal health, will at the same time encourage and facilitate birth-promotion among those persons whose representation in future generations is eugenically desirable. There is no reason why birth-control clinics should not regard it as their function both to teach methods of contraception and to diagnose and give advice upon the treatment of absolute and relative infertility. There is indeed every reason why they should; in the first place, to anticipate and effectively meet the criticism that birth-control, except perhaps in cases in which pregnancy might endanger life, has fulfilled whatever useful function it may ever have had and can now do little but mischief, and in the second, to stimulate the formation of birth-control clinics by public authorities who will not tolerate the teaching of birth-prevention unless birth-promotion is facilitated at the same time.

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It is necessary to be clear about what is meant by birth-promotion. If it implied nothing more than the diagnosis and treatment of sterility, its positive eugenic influence would be almost negligible. Certainly we should not be much concerned with it here. But in its wider sense—which involves the diagnosis and treatment of *all* the causes of infertility, psychological, social and economic as well as medical, it forms an integral and increasingly important factor in the policy of the *Eugenics Society*. Our aim, the promotion of socially advantageous fertility, can only be realized effectively if we first know why biologically well-endowed persons are in effect sterilizing themselves, and by what incentives they may be led to desire and to have more children. "There can," as Lord Horder recently pointed out, "be no eugenic opposition to quantitative increase in the birth-rate, provided this differential factor

is borne in mind, but to the eugenist in the Galtonian sense qualitative considerations must never give way to quantitative ones."

In this statement, which will be endorsed by every member of the *Society*, is the urgent reason for our present preoccupation with population problems. Of policies for increasing our numbers there will be no shortage; but we alone, this small body of eugenists, are concerned with the incalculably more important question as to what sources in our population the added numbers are to come from.

From the work of the Positive Eugenics Committee we have learnt at least this: that to promote fertility, differential or absolute, "it would be a mistake of the first magnitude to suppose that no more is needed than to smooth the path to parenthood by removing the disabilities under which parents suffer. For, if married couples are to have children, they must desire them; they cannot be bribed into parenthood."

"Given a new attitude to marriage and parenthood, based upon the new and revolutionary idea that recruitment must henceforth be a conscious process, the smoothing of the path to parenthood has a large part to play. But it is no simple matter to remove these disabilities. It is in the medical sphere that results could be most rapidly and easily reached. . . . It is a much more troublesome and expensive matter to devise and provide the special services required by parents and young children in the shape of a great extension of existing social services and of the setting up of new services. It is a still larger matter to attempt to remove those financial and other handicaps under which parents suffer when they are bringing up children and endeavouring to give them an entry into appropriate occupations. But these changes are as nothing compared with the transformation of the whole scheme of life which will gradually have to be accomplished if the inconveniences attaching to parenthood are to be removed, and the special problems attaching to

parenthood are to receive due consideration. Taken together nothing less than a social revolution is necessary. But it is a very different kind of social revolution from that which figures in the battle-cries of politicians. For the aim is to place the family where it ought on all grounds to be, in the centre of the social field, and to bring all other institutions into appropriate relations to it. It may be that the mere logic of the population situation will gradually divert interest from those creeds which loom so large to-day, and will lead to changes in social structure far more fundamental, but much more realistic and beneficial, than those which these creeds envisage.”\*

Professor Carr-Saunders concludes his analysis with some observations which supporters of birth-control (and its opponents) would do well to take to their hearts and with even greater advantage to their minds.

\* *Loc. cit.*, p. 256.

“ If anything is certain it is that people will resist being driven back under the tyranny of the unlimited family ; therefore all measures are suspect which are associated with an anti-birth-control movement. But it is much more than bad tactics. It implies a complete misunderstanding of the only possible solution of the small family problem. The solution must begin by welcoming the voluntary small family system, and that means welcoming birth-control. For birth-control is not merely a practice which must be tolerated ; it has positive functions of great importance to perform, such as, for example, making possible the proper spacing of the family. Let it be said clearly that the escape from the unlimited family makes a very great step forward in human history. The problem is to adjust outlook to the responsibility involved by the transition to the voluntary family system.”\*

\* *Loc. cit.*, p. 258.

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## CONTENTS

The Social Background of Recent Political Changes  
Historical Evidence for the Growth of the Chinese Population  
The Sociological School of Dimitrie Gusti  
National Socialism and the Family  
On Spirit and Method in Social Service

Ernest Barker  
C. P. Fitzgerald  
Philip E. Mosely  
Alfred Meusel  
Henry A. Mess

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